

a direction where there would be some type of reduction in these benefits very soon.

I am very worried about this whole idea that there are a number of individuals out there right now who, I think, find themselves in a position where, you know, they are going to wait. They are just going to wait. They are going to wait for September to come, they are going to wait for October to come before they really start to reengage.

The other thing in Wisconsin and other States that exists, when you are on unemployment insurance, you had to go out and look for a job. You know, you had to talk to employers and you had to develop your soft skills, which means, you know, making sure you are ready for work and you get to work on time. I am a little concerned that the pandemic has had a direct effect on that as well.

Madam Speaker, I just wanted to be here this morning to highlight these issues again. I would like to work with the other side of the aisle and I would like to work with the President to make sure that we can find a way of reversing what I think is a path that is really going to jeopardize our entire nationwide economy.

PREVENTING FUTURE PANDEMICS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. QUIGLEY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. QUIGLEY. Madam Speaker, I rise today to discuss what we must do to prevent the next pandemic and why it is not only a global health issue, but also an environmental one.

The origins of the pandemic we are battling now are clear: unsanitary, unsafe wildlife markets.

These markets, which are prevalent in some areas of Asia and Africa, but are present everywhere, including in the United States, are fed by trade in wildlife; some of it legal; some of it illegal; all of it very dangerous.

They are breeding grounds for a strain of viruses known as zoonotics, which are diseases born from the unnatural intermingling of the bodily fluids of different species in an unsafe and unsanitary market that sold wildlife, living and dead, for human consumption.

Other zoonotics include SARS, MERS, Zika, Ebola, swine flu, bird flu, HIV/AIDS, and now COVID. COVID-19 has truly opened the world's eyes to the danger of these markets and the global impact, and it should open our eyes to just how urgent the need for legislation around this is in order to prevent the loss of millions of lives.

That is why over the course of the last year I wrote the Preventing Future Pandemics Act along with my friend, Mr. FRED UPTON, and Senators CORY BOOKER and JOHN CORNYN in the Senate. We may not agree on much, but we agree on this: We have the power to prevent the next pandemic, and to do nothing would be an act of negligence.

A vital lesson that we need to learn from COVID is that we must fundamentally change the way that we interact with wildlife globally if we want to stop this from happening again. This means stopping deforestation and other habitat destruction, slowing and ending global climate change, and global shutdown of live wildlife markets.

Already we have seen how changes in temperature and weather patterns and encroaching human development have brought people and wildlife into more frequent and more intimate contact. Human consumption of wildlife is simply the most dangerous form of that contact.

To get at the root of this problem, the Preventing Future Pandemics Act would establish the official foreign policy of the U.S. to be that we would work with other countries to shut down these markets, end the trade in terrestrial wildlife for human consumption, and build international coalitions to reduce the demand for wildlife as food.

The bill would authorize funding for USAID to work on reducing demand for consumption of wildlife from wildlife markets, and support shifts to alternate sources of food and protein in communities that rely upon this consumption for food security.

Moreover, to truly lead by example, this bill would end the import and export of wildlife for human consumption in and out of the United States.

While wildlife is not a major source of protein in our country, these markets do exist here, and they still pose a danger. If we are to establish and maintain a position of international leadership on this issue, we must practice what we preach.

This bill will help us take significant steps to break down the silos between global health and conservation, because we know unequivocally that if we try to treat these as separate problems, we fail to solve either problem.

After the economic and social devastation of the past year, and the way that COVID-19 has upended all of our lives, it is my view that the Preventing Future Pandemics Act is a national security bill, a conservation bill, an animal wildlife bill, a small business bill, a travel industry bill, a manufacturing bill, a retail bill, a mental health bill, a housing bill, and a public transit bill. It is a bill to protect our lives and livelihoods from the threat of human consumption of wildlife and the associated wildlife trade.

I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to rally around this in order to potentially save the world from suffering the consequences of inaction and standing by hopelessly as we watch another pandemic ravage our world.

The next pandemic can be stopped, and the Preventing Future Pandemics Act is a vital first step. Let's do it together.

AFGHANISTAN WITHDRAWAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BACON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BACON. Madam Speaker, I agree with the comments of many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle expressing grave concern over the President's decision to establish a date certain for the withdrawal of all U.S. military forces from Afghanistan. I believe this decision is deeply misguided, and it is damaging to the long-term national security interests of the United States and our allies.

The strawman argument of ending forever wars might be a convenient campaign slogan, but it is strategically naive and deeply offensive to those who have volunteered to fight to ensure that the very organization which attacked us on September 11, 2001, is incapable of ever doing it again.

This is their job. It is a job that I did on four deployments. It is our sworn duty. It is their sworn duty. They are proud to do it, and we honor them for it.

The truth is our force levels in Afghanistan are a fraction of what they once were, and have been steadily decreasing for years. Maintaining a small residual force is not an unaffordable or unsustainable burden. More than any other deployment in the world, the U.S. and NATO presence in Afghanistan delivers tangible strategic benefits to the U.S. at a relatively small and ever-decreasing cost, not to mention the immense humanitarian benefit to the people of Afghanistan itself, especially the women and the girls.

The recent violence committed by the armed forces in Afghanistan only proves that the Taliban, al-Qaida, and ISIS-K clearly see this announcement as a full-fledged capitulation, and it reveals their true nature as untrustworthy and savage.

A military withdrawal must always be based on conditions, not a calendar. By establishing a specific date, we are simply surrendering the hard-fought leverage we have gained over two decades, and we are inviting the Taliban to embark on a vicious reign of terror against the Afghanistan people.

Furthermore, as a military man, I am utterly dismayed that we did not take the necessary steps to secure and prepare standoff basing in the region to project power when needed to conduct counterterrorism operations and to support the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces before announcing the withdrawal.

We put the cart before the horse. We now have a moral obligation to ensure that the Afghan security forces can continue functioning with the proper military and financial support to keep the Taliban from once again plunging Afghanistan into darkness.

Finally, and most urgently, we must honor our promises and keep faith with our partners and allies. Our values must remain the foundation of our foreign policy. If our partners and allies

lose faith in our ability to back them up, we willingly cede the field to an enemy who seeks our destruction.

It is now, unfortunately, a moral imperative to find a way to expedite the safe passage of the very people who stood by us for nearly two decades. They have been loyal to our shared vision and have sacrificed so much to the pursuit of democracy. Their safety must be an absolute priority for this administration.

So far, we have not observed sufficient urgency in developing an inter-agency plan to do this and in requesting the necessary resources and authorities from Congress. If we don't do this, the Afghans who helped our military will be hunted down and murdered by the Taliban.

We must ask ourselves: Did we learn anything from our clumsy withdrawal from Iraq in 2011?

The only thing more expensive than maintaining a moderate level of stability in a country like Afghanistan is the bloodshed and cost we will bear if we are forced to return.

This is not an academic, hypothetical consideration, nor is it a partisan issue. Like many others on this side of the aisle, I repeatedly and publicly expressed my deep concerns over President Trump's impulse for a hasty withdrawal.

The Taliban is still allied with al-Qaida. If the Taliban prevails after our withdrawal, it is very likely that al-Qaida will once again have a safe haven to conduct terrorism, and this is the very reason we invaded Afghanistan in the first place.

Fortunately, pushback from Congress and the previous administration slowed the withdrawal process while retaining negotiating leverage and key counterterrorism capabilities. Unfortunately, from my vantage point, this latest decision has abandoned any semblance of strategy. It is a retreat.

This hasty withdrawal is a tragic mistake, and we are going to regret it. I urge the President to change course before it is too late.

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HONORING MICHAEL LECIK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Virginia (Ms. SPANBERGER) for 5 minutes.

Ms. SPANBERGER. Madam Speaker, I rise to remember the life of a courageous, kind, and selfless Virginian, Mike Lecik.

Service was an unwavering part of who Mike was. Throughout his career, Mike served as an Air Force firefighter, an assistant fire chief with the U.S. Department of Defense, and the assistant chief at the Huguenot Volunteer Fire Department in central Virginia.

As an Air Force firefighter, Mike deployed twice to the Middle East. After coming home to Powhatan County, he was proud to serve in his local volun-

teer fire department. He cared deeply for his community and his country. A few years ago, Mike was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a blood cancer linked to the dangerous conditions of his service as an Air Force firefighter.

I first got to know Mike because the VA did not recognize this connection, and he wanted to do something about it. He wanted to learn more about how the system could be changed for the better and for the benefit of his fellow servicemen and -women.

This fight was not just about getting the support that he needed; rather, it was about the thousands of firefighters just like him who faced this challenge. Mike truly wanted every veteran firefighter to get the care they deserved.

Mike passed away earlier this year at the age of 41.

Mike was dedicated to his community, the safety of his neighbors, and, above all, his family. It was my honor to have him as a constituent.

Mike leaves behind a family and a community that deeply cared for him, and he leaves behind a cause that is worth championing.

Across the board, firefighters are more likely to be exposed to certain carcinogens. They are more likely to suffer certain diseases and illnesses because of their career. And they experience higher rates of cancer than the general U.S. population.

This connection is well-documented by scientific research, but it is yet to be recognized by the VA, the Federal agency entrusted with caring for those who have borne the battle.

Military firefighters put their lives on the line each day—not just to defend our country but also to selflessly defend their fellow servicemembers. But to this day, thousands of veteran firefighters are left uncovered by the VA for certain types of cancer treatments.

Earlier this year, I reintroduced the Michael Lecik Military Firefighters Protection Act in Mike's name to fix this longstanding issue. This bipartisan legislation would make sure diseases like Mike's are recognized as presumptive service-connected disabilities.

By recognizing the long-term effects of military firefighting and the diseases that can arise from this career over time, our bill would provide much-needed peace of mind and security to thousands of veteran firefighters and their families. It would lift an undue burden off thousands of veterans experiencing severe and often-terminal illnesses.

Right now, the VA doesn't cover significant treatment costs like those faced by Mike, as the VA, in many cases, does not recognize the direct service connection between firefighting and cancer as a presumptive service-connected disability beyond 1 year following Active Duty.

Our legislation would establish the presumption that veteran firefighters who become disabled by serious diseases, including heart disease, lung dis-

ease, and certain cancers like Mike's, within 15 years of separating from Active Duty contracted the illness due to their service in the military.

By creating this presumption, the VA would be required to provide equitable disability benefits and treatment cost coverage to veteran firefighters like Mike.

This legislation has the support of Democrats and Republicans from across the political spectrum, including many who have served our country.

Specifically, I would like to thank my Republican colleague, Congressman BACON from Nebraska, himself an Air Force veteran of nearly 30 years, for his continued partnership in leading this bill. I thank Congressman BACON for recognizing that this issue should unite us all because we all represent veterans with stories like Mike's.

Even as he was engaged in the battle of his life—for his life—Mike was eager to make progress on this issue. When I first reached out to Mike to ask whether he would like to be involved with the legislation, he never hesitated.

Mike had already been in touch with our team about some of his issues with the VA. And when asked if he wanted to take up this challenge and make a difference through the legislative process, he said: "Absolutely." He was ready to take up the mantle for his fellow vets. It was his honor.

Even as his illness progressed, he stayed apprised of new developments on this legislation, and my team was humbled to work with him. He showed incredible strength and determination that we will never forget.

The Michael Lecik Military Firefighters Protection Act is about a fundamental question: How do we show our gratitude and appreciation to those who served, to those who have put on the uniform, and to those who have worked under hazardous and dangerous conditions to keep their countrymen and fellow servicemembers safe?

The answer is found beyond platitudes. It is found beyond spoken promises. It is found in action. And it is found in delivering the benefits our veterans have earned through their sacrifice.

No veteran who puts on the uniform should repeatedly have to make the argument that their injury, their illness, is connected to their service when the evidence is so apparent—to the degree that the majority of our States have already recognized the link between these serious diseases and the occupational hazards of firefighting and have enacted presumptive disability laws.

In the case of Mike and thousands of firefighters like him, no veteran should experience a VA that refuses to help cover the costs of treating their service-connected cancer.

As I urge my colleagues to recognize the urgent need to pass the Michael Lecik Military Firefighters Protection Act, I am thinking of his wife, Tiffany, and his three daughters, Amery, Aubrey, and Addy. He loved them deeply, and I work in his honor.